

श्री शिव नारायण (बांसी) : अध्यक्ष महोदय, मैं माननीय सदस्या, श्रीमती शारदा मुकुर्जी, को धन्यवाद देता हूँ कि उन्होंने ऐसे पवित्र रेज़ोल्यूशन को इस हाउस के सामने पेश किया ।

अध्यक्ष महोदय : माननीय सदस्य राज धन्यवाद तक ही रहने दें, बाकी फिर कहें ।

17 hrs.

CALLING ATTENTION ON MATTERS OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

(i) FOOD AND SUGAR SITUATION IN WEST BENGAL

Mr. Speaker: I take up this adjournment motion now. May I enquire from Mr. Banerjee—he had put a question to me in the morning whether I desired to convert this adjournment motion into a calling attention notice—whether he is agreeable to that?

Shri S. M. Banerjee (Kanpur): I only submit that we want a discussion on this because the prices....

Mr. Speaker: That is a different thing. I must tell him beforehand that if I take this adjournment motion and then after hearing the Minister I come to a decision that that cannot be taken up, or I reject it, then I shall not be able to convert it into the calling attention notice and there would be no questions then by the Members who have signed this. Therefore, they are warned about those consequences that might follow. So, that would stand or fall on its merits.

Shri S. M. Banerjee: I have only one submission to make. Before you allow the Minister to make a statement, I may say there are some points which are agitating our mind. Either we should be allowed to put those points to him or let him make a statement and then..

Mr. Speaker: He has given the source of his information and that is the *Times of India* dated the 20th September—page 7. This is his information. I cannot allow him to discuss it before I have given sanction to it. Now, I am calling upon the Minister to give facts. Then, I have to take a decision whether I can take this up as an adjournment motion or not. If I reject it, in that case, he will not be allowed to put any questions. That is what I was asking him to consider.

Shrimati Renu Chakravartty (Barackpur): The only point is that this particular news item is reflecting what has been stated by the State Finance Minister. Therefore, this really stands on a different footing. I would have no objection if it is turned into a calling attention notice provided it is a satisfactory....

Mr. Speaker: That is to be seen. But the hon. Member would kindly realise that a statement of a Minister cannot by itself be a subject for an adjournment motion. It might raise certain issues and that we have to decide on merits when the statement is made. Therefore, if they are agreeable, I am prepared to convert it into a calling attention notice.

So, it is a calling attention notice. The hon. Minister.

Shri C. K. Bhattacharyya (Serampore): These are very important matters for the public of the State of West Bengal and they require discussion. You may find some opportunity for having this matter discussed.

Mr. Speaker: It is converted into a calling attention notice. The hon. Minister.

The Deputy Minister in the Ministry of Food and Agriculture (Shri A. M. Thomas): Mr. Speaker, Sir, in fact I have seen the press statement and I was rather surprised to see the statement because if there was any

alarming situation in West Bengal, as is put out according to the press, then the Chief Minister who is also in charge of civil supplies would certainly have brought it to our notice. We are in constant touch with the West Bengal Government and assessing the food situation almost every week. Moreover, there was a discussion in this House. There were so many questions raised on the floor of this House as well as in the other House and this alarming situation has not been brought to our notice by any Member, not even by Members hailing from West Bengal:

Shrimati Renu Chakravartty: We have brought this to your notice several times.

Shri A. M. Thomas: I shall deal with sugar first. So far as sugar is concerned, the monthly sugar quota fixed for West Bengal is 21,000 tonnes on the basis of the average monthly consumption of West Bengal during the last six months of the previous control period when the supply position was quite easy. Barring a small quantity from the two factories in the State, the entire quota is allotted from the sugar factories in U.P., and Bihar. The State Government usually allocates about 14,000 tonnes of sugar for the Calcutta industrial area and the balance about 7,000 tonnes for distribution in West Bengal districts. In Calcutta industrial area, sugar is distributed through fair price shops and in the districts through modified ration shops. There are nearly 1630 fair price shops in Calcutta industrial area. With a view to ensuring availability of larger quantities of sugar during the festival seasons, the State Government was informed of the allotments to be made for the next four months in advance. The allotments to be made on 30th August and 1st October were as follows:

30th August:	24,948 tonnes
1st October:	15,584 tonnes.

Each of these quantities included a quota of 2,100 tonnes for the two festi-

vals namely Durga Puja and Kali Puja. In view of the postponement of Durga Puja celebrations from September to October and of Diwali (Kali Puja) from October to November, the festival quota of 2,100 tonnes will now be given along with the releases on 1st October and 22nd October. On the 22nd of October, we would be releasing another 13,231 tonnes. The release for the 1st October quota is being made almost immediately.

We just inquired of the position after getting this adjournment motion, and we understand that from last Monday, in fact, some change or modification has been made in the quantum that is being given to the Calcutta industrial area. In fact, on the floor of this House also, a complaint was made about the discrimination that was being made between the urban area and the mofussil area. In fact, each adult in the industrial area, according to the information that we have got on the telephone—I think it must be correct—is being given per week 300 gms, and each child is being given 200 gms per week. That is the reduced one. So, it is not a significant quantity per week per head. Then as regards the other areas, we understand that in the rural areas, they are being given only 250 gms per head per month. In the urban areas, apart from the Calcutta industrial area, the quantum of ration is divided into three classes, namely A, B and C. A person in the Class gets 260 gms per head per week. So, it is only a difference of 40 gms. As far as the person in the B class is concerned, he gets 200 gms per week, and the person in the other class gets 150 gms per week.

Shrimati Renu Chakravartty: That is all on paper only.

Shri A. M. Thomas: Then, who has consumed all these 24,000 tonnes which are being given every month?

Shrimati Renu Chakravartty: The blackmarket.

Shri A. M. Thomas: In fact, it is all being issued on the basis of identity cards. And yet the hon. Member says that it goes into the blackmarket and so on.

Shrimati Renu Chakravartty: In the rural areas, how many people are covered by modified rationing. Has the hon. Minister any idea of that? What is he saying?

Shri A. M. Thomas: This is the position with regard to sugar.

It is only when this statement was seen in the press, that the complaint has been raised.

Shri S. M. Banerjee: Because it is a Minister's complaint. It is a Minister who has complained.

Shri A. M. Thomas: If the food situation also changes according to the changing fortunes of the Ministers, then I do not know what is going to happen....

Shrimati Renu Chakravartty: This speaks very badly of the Congress Party.

Shri S. M. Banerjee: Simply because that Minister is going out under the Kamaraj Plan, the Deputy Minister should not make such remarks.

Shrimati Renuka Ray: I think the Deputy Minister should not make that kind of remark. He should withdraw it.

Shri A. M. Thomas: If it is objectionable, then I would not like to make that remark, and I withdraw it.

As regards foodgrains, there is no difficulty at all about the supply position of wheat. Although the rice supply position in West Bengal is not easy, there can be no question of a food crisis. During the year 1963, we

had promised a total supply of 1.50 lakhs tonnes. More recently, we have agreed to supply an additional quantity of 20,000 tonnes. We have also arranged for a flow of about 25,000 tonnes of rice from Nepal and 15,000 tonnes from Andhra Pradesh on trade account. On 16th August, 1963, the West Bengal Government had a rice stock of 35,000 tonnes. Adding to this the quantity, in transit and the quantity still to be despatched against allotments, the total availability was 83,000 tonnes. Besides, they were still to receive another 14,000 tonnes from us. The offtake of rice during July-August was about 26,000 tonnes per month. Even at this rate of offtake, the supplies are adequate at least up to the end of November. The Aush crop which has started coming to the market has been better than that of last year and this should take care of the rural areas for about two months. The prospects of the main Aman crop are also better than last year's crop provided there are no natural calamities. Barring, therefore, unforeseen contingencies, the rice supply position in West Bengal should ease in December-January and should continue to be easier during the next year. With the Aush crop reaching the markets and the good prospect of the Aman crop, the offtake of rice from fair price shops is expected to fall from November. This is the situation.

As regards wheat, the entire requirements of the flour mills and the fair price shops in West Bengal are being met. The total issues of wheat during the year up to the end of August has been 221,000 tonnes to the flour mills in West Bengal and 406,400 tonnes for fair price shops, modified ration shops and chakki shops in West Bengal.

The Director General, Food, is also in Calcutta. Now we have given instructions to him to ascertain the position, whether there has been any development in the last two or three

days, and if so, what steps we on our part should take.

Shrimati Renuka Ray: I hope he will withdraw the remark he made about the Finance Minister of West Bengal who has gone out.

Shri A. M. Thomas: I did not make any mention in that way.

I did not want to say anything of that kind.

Shri C. K. Bhattacharyya: Should there not be a statement about the cloth position?

Mr. Speaker: That would be made

Shri S. M. Banerjee: There is a very small news item, but which is very important which has come. It says:

"The fear that no sugar would be available in West Bengal in the near future was expressed by the State Finance Minister, Mr. Sankardas Banerjee, here today (that is, September 19). He said the State was heading for a terrible crisis as there was no sign of the food situation improving".

If the statistics quoted by the hon. Minister are correct, what is the fear lurking in the mind of the State Finance Minister which has led to this statement? I want to know whether at present sugar is available after release.

Mr. Speaker: He can only put a question, not make a speech. He knows it already.

Shri S. M. Banerjee: What concrete steps have been taken by Government to see that the sugar released by the Centre or grain which is available in the market actually goes to those ration card holders and whether instructions have been sent to the West Bengal Government to use the DIR more rigidly?

Shri A. M. Thomas: As regards the question of where the quantity released has gone, we have made enquiries and we find that in the month of August, 21,000 tonnes of sugar were despatched by factories to West Bengal and about 2,500 tonnes upto the September 1963.

Shri Dinen Bhattacharyya: Are they actually reaching the card holders....

Shri A. M. Thomas: They should be reaching, according to the distribution arrangement now in force. The factories can only give to the nominees of the State Government, those persons authorised by the State Government receive from the factory.

With regard to the other matter, this was in fact raised in the State Assembly also. I find from a report in the *Amrit Bazar Patrika*, which very often hon. Members quote, the following:

"The Chief Minister, Shri P. C. Sen, denied the Opposition allegation that there was lack of rice supply in fair price shops in mofussil areas, particularly in North Bengal....

"He also gave comparative figures of rice price increase for three years from August 1961 to August 1963. While the rice price was 57 nP a kg. in August 1961, figures for the corresponding month during 1962 and 1963 were 68 nP and 84 nP a kg. respectively. About 68 lakhs of people were drawing rations from fair price shops in the State now against 21 lakhs in 1961".

Shri H. N. Mukerjee: Could I know if the Minister has ascertained if the Finance Minister of West Bengal did actually make this statement, and if so, for what reasons?

Shri A. M. Thomas: In fact, at the official level, there was some contact on the telephone. We do not have

[Shri A. M. Thomas]

the exact text of the statement of the Finance Minister.

Shrimati Renu Chakravartty: The Minister has given us a long list of the quantities of sugar and rice sent to West Bengal from the Centre. Does he really know whether these quantities really get to the ration card holders in Calcutta and to the shops, not the modified ration shops, and to the public in the rural areas and bakaries? Is it not a fact that much of this goes to the black market and the ration shops do not have the sugar and rice which have been sent from here? We want to know what check they have on the distribution system and whether the Central Government has made any enquiries.

Shri A. M. Thomas: It is a matter for the State Government. What more can we do? In fact, there are as many as 11,579 fair price shops.

Shrimati Renu Chakravartty: What shall we do with the shops?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member must also realise that distribution will be with the State Government.

Shrimati Renu Chakravartty: The Essential Commodities Act is a Central Act, and that also covers distribution.

Shri A. M. Thomas: Distribution is done on the strength of identity cards.

Shrimati Renu Chakravartty: The identity cards will have to be eaten then.

Shri Daji (Indore): From the statement made by the Minister himself, it is clear that only 68 lakhs drew rations while the population runs into crores. This fact coupled with the statement of the Finance Minister of West Bengal makes it clear that the stock position and even the supply position is not adequate.

And now the Durga Pooja and other festivals are coming. Particularly in view of the big festivals in Bengal, may I know what special arrangements and special quotas are now being released to Bengal?

Shri A. M. Thomas: With regard to sugar, I have mentioned the special quota. As for the rations, two crores of people are entitled to draw rations, but only 68 lakhs drew them.

Shri Daji: Because it is insufficient. Out of two crores, only 68 lakhs drew rations. That shows the balance one crore and 32 lakhs of people could not get rations because there is no supply in the shops.

The Minister of Food and Agriculture (Shri Swaran Singh): I do not think that that inference is correct. As my colleague has explained, every one is entitled to get a ration card, and these are the weaker sections of the community that get the ration cards. Others who can purchase from the open market or make their own arrangements need not ask for ration cards. The fact that the number of ration cards is less than the population does not lead to the conclusion which the hon. friend opposite is trying to draw from it.

Shri C. K. Bhattacharyya (Raiganj): Can a question be put from this side?

Mr. Speaker: No. Those who are not signatories cannot put.

(ii) RISE IN CLOTH PRICES IN
CALCUTTA

The Minister of International Trade (Shri Manubhai Shah): As is customary with us, before the coming of the Pooja and Diwali seasons, Government have been keeping a close watch on the availability and prices of cloth in Calcutta and Eastern Region. The reports both in the wholesale and retail market and the